

# BLACKGUM

*Nyssa sylvatica* Marsh.

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Pepperidge, Sour-gum, Tupelo, Tupelo-gum.

FORM: Medium sized, 40-70 feet high, trunk diameter 1-3 feet, in the South may reach a height of 100 feet, trunk straight, continuous into the crown, many lateral horizontal branches, some of the lower may be drooping, upper ascending; crown variable, may be short, cylindrical, flat-topped, conical, inversely conical.

BARK: Mature bark thick, grayish, divided by deep fissures, ridges interrupted into quadrangular and hexagonal blocks, resembling alligator skin.

TWIGS: At first green to orange color, in their first winter nearly glabrous or rufous-pubescent, light red-brown, later becoming darker, and developing short spur branchlets.

LEAVES: Alternate, simple, oval to obovate, 2-5 inches long, acute at apex, cuneate at base, entire or coarsely dentate, slightly thickened on margin, dark green and shiny above, often hairy below.

FLOWERS: Appear on long slender somewhat downy stalks; staminate and pistillate separate; staminate occur in dense many-flowered heads; pistillate in open few-flowered clusters.

FRUIT: An ovoid, dark blue drupe, 1/3-2/3 inch long, borne on long slender peduncles, 1-3 in a cluster; stone ovoid with 10-12 longitudinal ribs.

WINTER BUDS: Ovate, acute, smooth, reddish-brown, about 1/4 inch long with 3-5 visible scales; lateral buds sometimes superposed, close to leaf scars and sometimes protrude into them.

WOOD: Growth rings usually indistinct, coarse-grained, difficult to split, heavy, soft, strong, not durable, difficult to season, pale yellow or nearly white, with thick, paler

USES: Pulp. Historical uses: wheel hubs, egg and fruit crates, rolling pins, chopping bowls, excelsior, broom handles.

HABITAT: Widely disseminated by birds; grows in a wide variety of habitats, burned over areas, old fields and pastures, dry slopes; reaches best development along stream courses and about the margins of ponds.

DISTINGUISHED CHARACTERISTICS: Alligator bark when old; reddish-brown twigs, with conspicuous leaf scars; buds diverge very much from the twigs; horizontal position of branches on young trees.

DISTRIBUTION IN ALABAMA: Common throughout the State.

## EXPLANATION OF PLATE

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| 1. A flowering branch of the sterile tree | 6. Vertical section of a pistillate flower |
| 2. Flowering branch of the fertile tree   | 7. A fruiting branchlet                    |
| 3. A staminate flower                     | 8. Vertical section of a fruit             |
| 4. Vertical section of a staminate flower | 9. A fruit cut crosswise                   |
| 5. A pistillate flower                    | 10. A stone                                |
|   | 11. An embryo                              |
|   | 12. A winter branchlet                     |



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